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SUBJECT: Supporting the POTUS Visit: ConGen Guangzhou Swarmed to Build the Buzz

Ref: A) BEIJING 00003157

11. (SBU) Summary: Guangzhou programmed significant outreach to amplify the POTUS November 15-18 trip to China, hosted bloggers for the All-China Bloggers DVC prior to the visit, and used Twitter to deliver live content of the POTUS Shanghai speech to thousands of Chinese netizens. Although Foreign Affairs Offices (FAO) cancelled the majority of Post's planned Town Hall "watch parties," the south China public response was positive -- especially in Fujian where several schools were programmed for the first time, and Post's Twitter account remains a valuable resource to circumvent barriers to accurate information. End summary.
Bloggers and TV Coverage at the Consulate

12. (SBU) To build buzz in the run-up to the visit, Post co-hosted the first-ever Mission China Blogger DVC Conference with Beijing and Shanghai on November 12. Influential Guangzhou bloggers raised issues of Internet censorship, human rights, and imprisoned dissidents. Hong Kong Cable TV interviewed the bloggers immediately following the DVC and aired their report the next day. Audiences for the bloggers are estimated in the tens of millions, and for Hong Kong Cable TV in the millions.

Buzz

13. (U) During the week before the POTUS visit, Post spread the word about the President's agenda at American Culture Week at Xiamen University, as well as events in Guangzhou where officers discussed American history and debated on carbon emission reduction targets. Using the President's then up-coming visit as the backdrop, Xiamen Culture Week included welcoming remarks by the Consul General highlighting the POTUS visit, 17 lectures, events and movies to discuss financial systems, cultural difference, history, individualism and responsibility, social distinctiveness, family values, gender roles, the power of words, and the American Dream, with a total audience of nearly 1,000.

Twitter: Thousands of Followers

14. (SBU) At the urging of a censorship-hating local blogger, Post created a Twitter account to tweet live during the Shanghai Town Hall. Bloggers spread the word that Post had done so and by the time of the speech -- less than two work days after the site had been established -- Post had 2,195 "followers." China coverage was limited to U.S.-based websites, Shanghai TV, and scrolling text on Xinhua. Because no one knew if these would be blocked or Xinhua would be censored, many netizens checked Twitter to make sure they were getting accurate, up-to-date information from the Town Hall. Live in Shenzhen

15. (SBU) The Consul General hosted live streaming of the Town Hall for 100 students at Beijing University Transnational School of Law in Shenzhen. The school -- which follows a U.S. legal curriculum -- is supported by U.S. Supreme Court Justice Anthony M. Kennedy. Although no Chinese media broadcast the speech live, America.gov did not crash. When the streaming video did seize up, the Consul General used the opportunity to answer students' questions on transnational trade disputes, legal exchanges between the U.S. and China, and religious freedom.

Watch Parties: The Consulate Swarm

16. (SBU) Thirty officers volunteered to swarm out to 14 universities throughout Guangdong to host Town Hall "watch parties." Foreign Affairs Offices were unsupportive, and most of these programs were cancelled. When the dust had settled only four officers were able to travel to universities in Guangzhou, where they led discussions with 230 students; during one of these watch parties, a local documentary crew filmed the presentation. In Fujian, the Consul General and Transformational Diplomacy Officer spoke about the POTUS visit at four schools to another 550 students. The TD Officer presentations at Fuzhou University (30 students) and Jimei University (130 students) represented the first time that these schools have accepted public affairs programming, setting a hopeful precedent for the future. At Xiamen University of Technology, the TD Officer met with an overflow audience of 240 students.

Fifty-fifty

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17. (SBU) Summary and Comment: Despite Foreign Affairs Offices severe but expected restriction of Post's outreach, programming was extensive and well received. The key to public diplomacy's success in south China remains an assumption that over 50% of what one hopes to do will be cancelled and to plan accordingly. End Summary and Comment.
GOLDBECK